

Gaza

Israelis reckon with growing global isolation



Backlash over Gaza war stokes fears from travellers to entrepreneurs that country is heading for pariah status

Neri Zilber in Tel Aviv

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The summer calm in Syros was shattered last month when hundreds of locals gathered at the picturesque Greek island's ancient harbour, chanting "Free Palestine" and protesting an approaching Israeli cruise ship.

The 1,600 passengers on the Crown Iris, which had come from Haifa, were blocked from disembarking and rerouted to Cyprus due to security concerns.

The incident prompted many Israelis to wonder: if they could no longer feel welcome in Greece — arguably Israel's most popular tourist destination and a place with which it shares deep diplomatic, military and cultural ties — where else was left?

Nearly two years since Hamas's October 7 2023 attack triggered Israel's devastating reprisal in Gaza, the trend across much of the world is clear: Israel is increasingly criticised, sanctioned and isolated, all while support grows among western allies for recognising a Palestinian state.

Israeli commentators have taken to calling the swell of opprobrium a "diplomatic tsunami", after a 2011 speech by then-defence minister Ehud Barak warning that the lack of a peace process with the Palestinians would turn his country into a pariah and "push Israel into the corner from which [apartheid] South Africa's decline began".

"I do not remember a situation that has been so critical in terms of our international standing, attacks on our legitimacy, and criticism against the government . . . including in the US," said Jeremy Issacharoff, a retired senior Israeli diplomat who served as ambassador to Germany. "Some of our best friends are sending us very negative signals."





Pro-Palestinian protesters demonstrate against a cruise ship from Israel in Syros, Greece © Stringer/Anadolu/Getty Images

As the death toll has risen and Israeli aid restrictions have plunged Gaza to the brink of starvation, global condemnation of its offensive has intensified, with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s decision last week to expand the campaign and “finish the job” against Hamas provoking yet more censure from allies.

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz declared the Israeli military response was “no longer justified”, while French President Emmanuel Macron slammed Israel’s planned escalation as a “disaster . . . waiting to happen”.

More than a dozen countries — including the UK, France, Canada and Australia — have indicated their intention to [recognise a Palestinian state](#) by next month at the UN meetings in New York.

A growing number of fiercer international critics have accused Israel of committing genocide, while Netanyahu himself has since November been subject to an International Criminal Court warrant for “crimes against humanity”.

The Israeli public is “realising that this is deeper, more widespread and serious than ever before”, one former senior Israeli official said, adding that the growing international pressure has “cut through”.

Arms embargoes against Israel have grown over the course of the war, with Germany — a major weapons exporter whose staunch support for Israel is rooted in the Holocaust — last week suspending deliveries of arms that could be used in Gaza.



Germany has been a staunch supporter of Israel, but last week suspended arms deliveries that could be used in Gaza © John MacDougall/AFP/Getty Images

Norway's \$2tn oil fund, the world's largest sovereign wealth fund, said this week it had [sold a fifth of its Israeli investments](#) and severed ties with Israeli fund managers in response to the war.

Norway's Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre told a podcast "the drama right now is Israel's damaged reputation in countries that have always had sympathy for it". "It's going to have an impact over time, and I think it will be very dramatic for Israel," he added.

The economic crunch has already started to be felt in the Israeli tech sector, especially from European investors, according to private messages seen by the Financial Times in an online forum of hundreds of Israeli and Jewish venture capitalists.

One message from a limited partner said "the idea of investing in a country that is directly blocking the influx of necessary aid [to Gaza] is something we're wrestling with on moral grounds". Another fund manager relayed: "Israel is a bit of a non-

starter in Denmark.”

Israeli entrepreneurs “feel like they’re becoming Russia without the official sanctions”, said Amir Mizroch, a Tel Aviv-based global communications adviser.

Mizroch said that with European money a fraction of US investment, the larger concern was the potential hit to joint research and academic collaborations in spheres such as semiconductors, chip design and through the EU’s Horizon science-funding programme.

Attempts to freeze Israel out of the programme, along with the wider EU association agreement, have failed due to opposition from governments including Germany and Hungary. But it remains unclear how long that can hold, especially if the Gaza war expands.



As the death toll has risen and Israeli aid restrictions have plunged Gaza to the brink of starvation, global condemnation of its offensive has intensified © Jack Guez/AFP/Getty Images

Even backing in the US, Israel’s staunchest ally, has cratered, especially among Democrats and independents. Only 32 per cent of the public were supportive of Israel’s military action in Gaza, according to a Gallup poll from last month.

Yet the backing of US President Donald Trump appears undiminished for now

Yet the backing of US President Donald Trump appears undiminished for now, despite signs of dissent inside the MAGA wing of the Republican party. And barring an about-face by Trump, the Netanyahu government appears undeterred by the global cacophony.

Israeli ministers have portrayed recognition of Palestinian statehood as a “reward” for Hamas, suggesting European leaders have “caved” to domestic pressure from the media, leftwing groups and their “Muslim minorities”.

“We will win the war, with or without the support of others,” Netanyahu said on Sunday, adding that he told European leaders their internal political pressures were “your problem — that is not our problem”.

Even the former official, a critic of the Netanyahu government, argued that the tools foreign governments had chosen to pressure Israel were the wrong ones, especially recognising a Palestinian state — which “even moderate Israelis will react negatively to after October 7”.

“The majority of the Israeli public already thinks the war should end, we don’t need our friends abroad to tell us that,” the former official added. “The government of Israel needs to be pressured, not the Israeli public.”

While the steps have yet to really affect daily life in Israel, the Israeli media was in the past month filled with reports of army veterans pursued for war crimes when visiting Latin America and Europe, and of Israeli restaurants vandalised in Sydney and Berlin.

An Israeli DJ was also taken off the list of a Belgian music festival due to vague “security concerns” and holidaymakers were assaulted in Athens, spurring Israeli authorities to advise those travelling abroad to “minimise” signs of their nationality.

The concern among both current and former Israeli officials is that further sanctions could be looming, forcing them to contemplate a future in which Israel is barred from international events, subject to a wider arms embargo and visa-free travel is revoked.

“This is a process that can get very bad in many different directions,” said Issacharoff,

the former diplomat. “We live in a global world. No man and no country is an island.”

Additional reporting by Richard Milne in Arendal

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